

Approved For Release 2000/05/24 : CIA-RDP75-00001R0
KANSAS CITY, MO.
TIMES

M - 334,249

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USS Pueblo: Journey Into Jeopardy—2

Pueblo Sails Out of San Diego Port

So interwoven are the facets in the story of the U.S.S. Pueblo that the Associated Press decided it should be told in full—in one story.

This is the second of thirteen articles on the Pueblo's ill-fated journey by Sid Moody, Jules Loh and Richard Meyer, who were assigned to produce the 40,000-word report.

In the opening episode in *The Star* yesterday the Pueblo had completed reconditioning (as an electronics surveillance ship) at the shipyard in Bremerton, Wash., and on November 6, 1967 sailed from San Diego westward across the Pacific, the beginning of her fateful journey.

In a simple time, a sea voyage in a Navy ship was clear cut. In peace: Be vigilant. In war: Meet the enemy and engage.

But 1967 was not a simple time. War had become cold but with an awesomely low boiling point. Armageddon seemingly could spark from the misreading of a crossed wire sending a false signal. And it could come, too, from the failure to intercept a true signal.

That was why Pueblo's God Hut was a myriad of electronics, the compact refinement of hundreds of millions of dollars of research. For she was a ship of spies. Some of her crew—a few—knew it. Some—most—could only swap scuttlebutt.

It is called ELINT—electronic intelligence. It is the price of admittance and perhaps survival in a new world. It is a listening game, and only a major power can afford to play.

The Navy's crown of such dowdy carriers for the electronic spies of this struggle was not unintentional. Russia uses everyday trawlers, more than 40 of them. The U. S. has about a dozen ELINT ships, although other Navy vessels are used for the same purpose.

While the spikes and domes of their antennae belie their seeming innocence, Washington has reached a tacit gentleman's agreement with the Soviets. If they stay outside the American 3-mile limit and don't unduly hinder U. S. warships on their appointed rounds by sailing too close aboard, they may stay in peace. Or, at least, non-war.

But the risk of provocative incident remains: A too-close warning shot across a bow, a too-dangerous flirting with jealousy defined coastal waters, an all-spy moving close all the better to hear.

Spying at Sea

Gary Powers and his U-2 have become history. So has the RB-47 and its crew of three shot down over Russia. Russian planes, too, are over the North Pole to excite American radar stations and learn their reactions. Russian trawlers bob innocently outside U. S. bases around the world logging the comings and goings of Polaris missile submarines. They snoop after American carriers in the Mediterranean and the Gulf of Tonkin. They cruise slowly past American coastal radars. Listening.

"Anything that approaches the coast of a hostile country, any one of those damn missions could get us into hot water because the other side doesn't know what the mission is coming to do," said Rep. Otis Pike of New York, a man who would come to know much about ELINT.

From 1949-61 U. S. ships and planes were involved in 33 ELINT "incidents." From 1961 to this April there were eight such.

But if there are risks, there are rewards. When Russia put missiles in Cuba in 1962, it was an American spy ship that first detected them by picking up signals associated with their radar control. U-2s confirmed that.

During the 1967 Israel-Egyptian war, Nasser and Hussein claimed U. S. planes had attacked them. Russian ELINT ships in the Mediterranean enabled Moscow to know otherwise. "It was extremely important to us under those circumstances that the Soviets know that," said former Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara.

So once a month at one of their tri-weekly afternoon meetings, the Joint Chiefs of Staff consider a docket of proposed ELINT missions.

The Chiefs Decide

The docket is compiled from missions proposed by the intelligence staffs of the various services and other government agencies. In the morning before the JCS meeting, an intelligence and an operations aide briefs each chief of his service's proposals. If he finds the mission acceptable, he can approve it at that level. If he has a question or a reservation, the mission is presented to the JCS for their decision.

"About 80 per cent of the missions are approved at the JCS level because one or more members has a question," said Gen. Earle Wheeler, chairman of the joint chiefs.

"We try to balance risk with necessity. We recognize some sensitive spots, but the risk has to be taken. At the beginning of the Korean war, there was such an intelligence lack, it was 11 hours after the North Koreans attacked before people were sure this was a major attack. This is what we are trying to preclude."

As she made her passage west, the Pueblo still had not received her mission assignments. But an old shipmate of hers had been at work spying in the Orient for several years. She was FP-43, the sistership from Kewaunee launched by Helen Brogan and now called the Banner.

Spying, electronically or through a keyhole, is not a highly publicized activity, but it is generally recognized what ships such as the Banner are capable of doing.

Fingerprints in Sea

Communist surface shipping and

naval movements, identify and photograph the vessels. Spotting submarines is more complex. Sonars pick up from miles away the sounds of a submarine's wake turbulence, propeller vibrations and the like. Each submarine has its own characteristic sound, like a fingerprint. The sonar readings are tape recorded and compared with a library of previously taped readings of known submarines and their movements are thus monitored.

Radar spying involves determining such characteristics as wave length and pulse and frequency and recording them. Knowing these, the sets can be jammed by electronic static or fooled by sending false bouncebacks on their own frequencies, in time of attack, disguising the actual position of an airplane or ship. Such detection can also be done in tandem with a plane that flies into range of the radar while the ELINT ship listens offshore.

The ships also lie to and simply listen to civilian and military radio bands picking up whatever comes over, be it a weather broadcast, news program or talk between MIG pilots and their bases. What may seem trivial on first hearing may be highly important when pieced in with other intelligence.

Ships are ideal for some ELINT work because they can stay on station for long periods. But they have one disadvantage: They have to live close inshore to be able to pick up radar waves which don't normally bend around the curvature of the earth except in the case of some antimissile sets. Planes are useful because they can pick up radar from great distances. Submarines, too, have an advantage in being able to drop from sight—although not sound—but the Navy will not say if it uses subs for ELINT. Nor if Pete Bucher was chosen for his first command because of any ELINT experience during his submarine days. But he, himself, would speak after taking command of the Pueblo of "my long standing familiarity with the program."

Pike would only say: "There are more sophisticated missions by sea than the Pueblo was sent on. There could have been an allusion to an ocean-wide network

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